



Background

As we begin to wind down the conflict in Afghanistan, America's longest war, it's time to focus on another war that has been going on four times longer: the war on drugs.

Today over 2 million people are incarcerated in the United States, more than any other country in the world and 50% of all federal inmates are there for drug-related crimes. It's part of the reason our spending on corrections has increased at a much higher rate than our spending on higher education over the last 20 years.

Despite four decades of efforts by seven presidents, countless Members of Congress, and state and local officials, which sent hundreds of thousands of Americans to jail, costing several hundred billion dollars, we are no closer to winning this war. In fact, there are ominous signs that it is only getting worse.

Cocaine and heroin are still readily available to those who want them. Small-town America is being engulfed with a torrent of methamphetamine addiction and its production, violence and human wreckage. Since 2003, prescription drug overdoses have killed more people than heroin and cocaine combined, and their abuse is now our fastest growing drug problem. The drug trade continues to cause violence and some of the worst human-rights atrocities around the world, fueling drug lords and destabilizing already fragile countries.

Simultaneously, our policies have pointlessly damaged and even destroyed lives of casual users of marijuana; a drug that one-third of Americans have used and that 50% of voters believe should be legalized. In 2010, over 600,000 people were arrested for marijuana possession. We continue to struggle over medical marijuana at the federal level, despite the fact that many states have already chosen to legalize it, and many people demand access to it for

legitimate medical purposes.

While we focus on these ineffectual policies, we continue to lose the battle against drug addiction and its very real consequences for our communities, public health and public safety.

Solution

Congressman Blumenauer long concluded that marijuana should be decriminalized. At a minimum, he advocates for rational policies, penalties and enforcement that are risk-based, scientific and reflects how Americans think, feel, and behave. We should start with a robust debate about legalizing, taxing and regulating marijuana in the same way we treat alcohol and tobacco. This debate would allow us to consider refocusing resources and efforts away from casual marijuana use to combating drugs that aggressively destroy communities and kill people, such as methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin.

While this debate goes on, Blumenauer believes Congress should act. Currently, the federal government ignores science and states' rights. Congress should pass H.R. 2306, the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act, which would remove all federal penalties pertaining to marijuana, delegating its regulation to each state. Until Congress passes legislation like HR 2306, it should at least rationalize existing laws relating to medical marijuana. Congress can do this by enacting H.R. 1983, the Medical Marijuana Patient Protection Act, to provide for the use of medical marijuana in accordance with the laws of the various states. Also, H.R. 6134, the Truth in Trials Act, would allow both federal and state laws to be considered at any trial concerning marijuana.

We also need to focus more resources on education and prevention as well as rehabilitation services. Substance abuse, whether it involves alcohol, painkillers or illegal drugs like heroin, costs the economy billions of dollars in lost productivity. Worse, it destroys lives, wreaking havoc on families, particularly children. Blumenauer has worked to fully fund and expand programs that combat drug use on the front-end, and that offer support and resources for those battling addiction. This money would be available if we refocus our expensive and ineffective war on drugs.

Right now we are on a path that combines the worst of both worlds. We criminalize behaviors

that many Americans think are appropriate and we aren't doing enough to help those who are struggling with addiction to alcohol and other drugs. It is time to change our laws before we travel further down this road with nothing to show but billions of dollars wasted, and hundreds of thousands of damaged lives.

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